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#### PLACES OF CULTURAL MEMORY:

# AFRICAN REFLECTIONS ON THE AMERICAN LANDSCAPE

Introduction

CONFERENCE PAPERS

May 9–12, 2001 Atlanta, Georgia

he 13 essays that appear in this compilation were prepared for the conference, "Places of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape." This conference was held May 9–12, 2001, in Atlanta, Georgia.

The conference developed from an idea posed by Falona Heidelberg, now the Executive Director of the African American Experience Fund at the National Park Foundation. While her initial interest was in the African Burial Ground in New York City, she believed that there was much about African cultural heritage in the United States that was little known and under-appreciated. Together with Katherine H. Stevenson, Associate Director, Cultural Resource Stewardship & Partnerships of the National Park Service, Ms. Heidelberg began a series of meetings to discuss the possibility of convening a conference on the tangible aspects of African American history.

As the conference program evolved, three consultants from the scholarly community were engaged to advise on the major conference themes and prospective speakers. The conference sponsors appreciate the major input of Joseph E. Harris of Howard University, LaVerne Wells-Bowie of Clemson University, and John Vlach of George Washington University. Their interest in and support of this conference clarified the program content.

Antoinette Lee of the NPS National Center for Cultural Resources was assigned to organize and implement the conference and provide editorial direction for the conference papers. Scott Whipple, now of the Maryland Historical Trust, assisted her in the early phases of the conference planning. Later, Brian Joyner was hired to coordinate the details of the conference and to provide editorial support for this compilation of papers. Marcia Axtmann Smith prepared the design for this compilation, based in part on the artwork for the printed conference announcement that LaVerne Wells-Bowie provided.

The topic of the influence of African cultural heritage on the American landscape is introduced in this compilation of conference papers. Readers will note that this topic is a potentially vast one—one that deserves additional attention if the historic preservation programs of the nation are to adequately reflect the contributions of Africans to the development of the United States.



#### Session One:

## MEMORIALIZING PLACES OF DIASPORA

or centuries, Africans have been dispersed throughout the world and have established "communities" outside of Africa. These scattered communities retain their African identities within the culture of the host communities. The Diaspora involves places of departure, arrival, resistance, liberation, linkages, emigration, migration, escape, and other places where movement of human populations took place.

Freedom's Trail: The Florida Cuba Connection

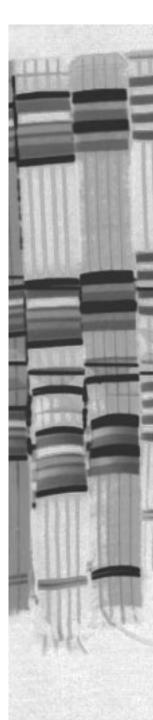
Ralph B. Johnson

Africanisms Upon the Land: A Study of African Influenced Place Names of the USA

Annette I. Kashif

Autobio-graphic Space: Reconciling African American Identity with the (In)Visible Past

coleman a. jordan (ebo)



## Freedom's Trail: The Florida Cuba Connection

Ralph B. Johnson

Session One:

Memorializing Places of Diaspora

efore emancipation and during Reconstruction in the United States free Africans found themselves in a very precarious position, being neither slave nor free. Achieving freedom was a major accomplishment, but one that could not be taken for granted. Even after leaving slavery some people had to struggle to claim their civil rights and retrieve them if they were abrogated for some reason. They found solace in their own communities. These were self-contained communities where every member of the community contributed to the whole. Many were skilled carpenters, masons, and agriculturists. Together they cleared the land, planted new fields, built homes, built the church, and the fortifications to protect their community.

In their new communities, once again the Africans, now free, found it necessary to sacrifice their beliefs in order to fit within the host culture. They learned a new language, converted to a new religion, risked their lives as many had to escape bondage on this southern "trail to freedom," and acquired loyalty to foreign governments, often by military services. Such was the case in "La Florida," a province of the Spanish crown, and now the southeast region of the United States of America.

In 1762 the English were finally successful in capturing Havana, Cuba a stronghold of the Spanish Empire in the Caribbean. However, in the Treaty of Paris Spain ceded *La Florida* and *Gracia Real Santa Teresa de Mose* to England, in exchange for Havana and Puerto Rico. The following year the residents of her Florida communities

were evacuated and moved to Cuba, even though His "Britannic Majesty" agreed to allow remaining inhabitants of in 1763 the "liberty of the Catholic religion." No more than eight Catholics and laymen could be found anywhere on the peninsula. Thus ended nearly a century of safe haven for run-away slaves from the British Carolina and Georgia low-country plantation system. This was most timely given the fact that the peak of the colonial import trade in slaves was probably reached between 1764 and 1773, the period that overlaps nine of the 21 years of British occupation of Florida.

## Slavery in Spain and Her Colonies

The institution of slavery in Spain was different than other European nations. Slaves had a moral and juridical personality, and Spanish legislation specifically granted them rights and protections in addition to obligations. Spanish slave codes were derived from the Justinian Code, and had been incorporated into Castilian law in the thirteenth century by King Alfonso X. As African slaves reached Spain in the fifteenth century, they were ruled by this legislation, known as the Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso El Sabio. The Siete Partidas also governed slavery in the New World. The Siete Partidas, and its adaptations, formed a body of law that held that slavery was against natural law, for God had created man free. This philosophy was held in the context of a country steeped in religious righteousness.

The "Catholic Monarchs," as King Ferdinand and Queen Isabelle were affectionately called, were very concerned about the souls of their subjects. This applied most importantly to the Indies and Spanish Florida. Slaves, Native Americans, and free men were brothers in Christ and it was the responsibility of masters and the Church to teach them the rudiments of the faith so that they might be admitted into the Church and enjoy all its sacra-



ments. These included marriage. The sanctity of the family was protected by requirements not to separate members of the family. Brotherhood in the Church sometimes served to tie masters to slaves in fictive kinship arrangements, when owners served as godparents and marriage sponsors for their slaves.

Slavery was considered as an accident of fate, and an aberration in nature, rather than a perpetual or preordained condition. These circumstances, the emphasis on a slave's humanity and rights, and the lenient attitude toward manumission embodied in Spanish slave codes and social practice made it possible for a significant free black class to exist in the Spanish world. Aside from this attitude, blacks were not free of racial prejudice.

Embroiled in a social and religious reconquest of its own at home, Spain was nevertheless preoccupied with racial purity and blacks that ruled Iberia for several centuries up to this period were assigned to the bottom of the social hierarchy. But the Spanish recognized early on the useful contributions blacks might make in their colonial empire. Their services were welcomed particularly in the area of defense. Florida was an important and strategic location for the safe passage of Spanish treasure fleets and later, as a buffer against French and English colonization. For some time blacks were drafted into the militia. As early as the sixteenth century, militia companies in Santo Domingo, Cuba, Mexico, Cartagena, and Puerto Rico included black regiments. In Florida a company of black and mulatto militia was formed as early as 1683, and there may have been earlier ones.

Blacks were incorporated into services in another respect. Pedro Menedez de Aviles, established the first successful Spanish settlement in Florida,

assisted by black laborers and artisans imported from Havana. They worked on early fortifications, sawed timber, and built several structures, including a church, a blacksmith shop, and an artillery platform. They also cleared land for planting and harvested the crops. Florida was a part of Spain's strategy to substantiate its claim to the Americas, denied of course by its rivals, France and England. It was important therefore to effectively occupy and populate the respective territories.

By papal donation the lands of the so-called New World belonged to the Catholic Monarchs of Spain. The Spanish Crown hoped to populate these lands with Christian pobladores or population, much as they had done in the areas Spain re-conquered from the Moors. They hoped to build ordered and just communities in the Americas, modeled after those of Spain. Although earlier municipal legislation existed, the regulations of Charles V are notable for the detail with which they prescribe the rituals for town foundation, the establishment of municipal governments and parishes, the proper division of lands, and the actual physical organization of ideal towns. The Crown, through its local representatives (the governors or municipal officers) could allocate Crown land to deserving or needy subjects, and town building was considered a noble, and indeed, a necessary objective of the Spanish administration.

In October 1687, the first known fugitive slaves from Carolina arrived in St. Augustine, the Spanish colony in La Florida. Governor Diego de Quiroga dutifully reported to Spain that eight males, two females, and a three-year-old nursing child had made good their escape in a boat. Six of the men were put to work in the Castillo, but two others were assigned to work with the blacksmith, a possible indication that

they already had skills in that area. The women became domestics in the house of the governor. All were paid for their labor. When an English official arrived the next fall to claim them, Governor Quiroga refused to release them, on the grounds that they had received religious instruction and been converted to Catholicism, had married, and were usefully employed. Moreover, they claimed to fear for their lives. Thus a fugitive slave policy began to evolve which would have serious diplomatic and military consequences for Spain.(1) King Charles II, on November 7, 1693, issued the first official position on the runaways, "giving liberty to all...the men as well as the women...so that by their example and by my liberality others will do the same."

#### Gracia Real De Santa Teresa De Mose

By 1736, records show that a total of 630 Spaniards and 143 slaves and free Africans were confirmed in the new church of St. Augustine, Nuestra Senora de la Leche. And, by 1738 the settlement of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose or Fort Mose as it was commonly known, was established by African-born run away slaves from the English Carolina and Georgia plantations. It was located approximately two miles north of St. Augustine. Fort Mose was strategically situated to protect both land and water routes to St. Augustine; and, the African homesteaders vowed to "spill their last drop of blood in defense of the Great Crown of Spain and the Holy Faith, and to be the most cruel enemies of the English." They cleared the lands they received from the governor, planted crops to sustain their families, and built a settlement that included a small fort complex. It included associated structures such as a church and

sacristy, and a number of houses that seem to have been scattered among the planted fields.

In many ways, the settlement at Fort Mose resembled those of the Native American villages also on St. Augustine's periphery. The structures at Fort Mose were said to be thatched bohios, "such as the Indians have." Archeological investigations at the site also prove the diet of Africans and Indians to had been heavily dependent upon riverine resources and nondomesticated animals hunted or trapped in the surrounding forests. Historical records indicate that an African Mandingo leader named Francisco Menendez governed the community. This Mandingo warrior also commanded the Fort Mose militia for almost thirty years.

The Free Black Militia Company of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose consisted of the following:

Commander Don Geronimo de Hita y Salazar; Cura Beneficiado, Don Agustin Geronimo de Resio; Captain Francisco Menendez, Lieutenant Antonio Joseph Eligio, Second Lieutenant Francisco Escobedo, Sergeant Pedro Graxales, Antonio Gallardo, Thomas Chrisostomo, Pedro de Leon. Pedro de Fuentes. Francisco Rosa, Juan Fernandez, Juan de la Torre, Francisco Joseph Menendez, Joseph Escobedo, Francisco Graxales, Antonio Blanco, Francisco Diaz, Joseph Bentura, Manuel Rivera, Joseph de Pena, Nicolas Briones, Francisco Suni, Joseph Fernando, Santiago Solis, Francisco de Torres, Juan Lamberto, Antonio Garcia, Julian Bulero, Pedro Martines, Nicolas de Cesar, Ignacio Roso, Juan Chrisostomo, Juan Thomas de Castilla.(2)

After the British General James Oglethorpe destroyed the first settlement of Fort Mose during the 1740 invasion, Menendez and his "subjects" built a second settlement in 1752. Historical and archeological research at the second Fort Mose has produced a rich picture of the Afro-Hispanic colonial life on the Spanish frontier. Fort Mose withstood repeated Indian attacks, and the deprivation associated with an embattled frontier until the 1763 mass evacuation of La Florida colonists to Cuba. There, they established a new frontier homestead, San Agustin de la Nueva Florida in the province of Matanzas.

#### San Augustin De Le Nueva Florida, Cuba: Ceiba Mocha

The Seven Year War, known in America as the French and Indian War, culminated with English forces capturing the port of Havana. In the First Treaty of Paris, La Florida was chosen over Puerto Rico by King Charles III of Spain to be the more easily expendable property. The transfer of sovereignty to England was formally done, and the first Spanish Period of Florida came to an end.

By March 1764, eight transports arrived in Havana with 3,104 people. Florida's governor, Melchor Feliu, oversaw the evacuation of the Spanish colony, organizing a flotilla of ships to carry its citizens to Cuba. The exiles included Spaniards, Canary Islanders, Catalans, Indians from the mission villages of Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe de Tolomato and Nuestra Senora de la Leche, and African residents of Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose.

Initially the Floridians were housed in Havana, and in the outlying towns of Guanabacoa and Regla. Within months of their arrival in Cuba, however, the government arranged the transfer of 73 Floridian families or a total of 331 persons to a new settlement in the province of Matanzas, to be called San Agustin de

la Nueva Florida. It was also popularly known as Ceiba Mocha. (The word "Ceiba" is the Spanish name of a tree also called the Cottonwood tree that in Africa possesses a sacred significance.)

The group included 13 Spanish families, 43 Canary Island families; four English families (called Germans on the reports), four free *pardo* or *mulatto* families (members of the free disciplined militia of Havana posted in St. Augustine); and nine free *moreno* or *black* families (from the free militia of Mose). The following year, 11 more service families from Florida joined them.

A wealthy rancher, Don Geronimo Contreras, donated the land to establish the new town and the Crown gave each household head a *caballeria* (approximately) of uncultivated land, a stipend of sixty *pesos*, tools, and a slave newly imported from Africa to assist in the labor of homesteading. The Mose militiamen received the following plots of land:

Lot # 40 Francisco Menedez

Lot # 45 Juan Chrisostomo Gonzalez

Lot # 60 Juan Fernandez

Lot # 61 Francisco Diaz

Lot # 65 Antonio Gallardo

Lot # 67 Joseph Ricardo

Lot # 68 Lieutenant Joseph Antonio Elixio

Lot # 91 Captain Francisco Menendez

Lot # 92 Domingo de Jesus Parilla

Lot # 93 Thomas Chrisostomo

The free pardo militiamen from Havana posted in St. Augustine received the following plots of land:

Lot # 83 Captain Manuel de Soto (of Havana militia)

Lot # 94 Joseph Orozco

Lot # 98 Juan Fermin de Quixas

Government officials also provided the new colonists with food until they could harvest crops. After nine years, the homesteaders were obligated to repay the cost of the slave (150 pesos) and the subsidy (60 pesos) or a total of 210 pesos to the royal treasury.

Conditions at the new settlement were difficult. The homesteaders struggled to clear the land, plant fields, and build new structures in an untamed wilderness. Smallpox swept among the slaves, killing many. Several slaves revolted and killed their owners. The Floridians pleaded for more assistance from Havana. They reported, "We have not been supplied with (shelter) to protect our bodies from the punishments of the weather, and consequently, without housing or sustenance find ourselves obliged to sleep under doorways exposed to inclement conditions."

Another report from 1766 stated that all the conditions at Ceiba Mocha suffered the same defect—there was no water to drink, it was difficult to drill wells in the land, and the closest water was the river which was one-half to two-thirds leagues distant.

The report added that the only reason 16 families stayed there was that they were too poor to move. Although a total of 200 *solares*, or town lots, had been donated for the Floridians, there was some delay in allotting the property. The people lived in huts scattered around the countryside among their fields. These "sad shacks" were described as being constructed of yagua, which is the impermeable and pliable material that joins a palm frond to the trunk of the palm.

Because the homesteaders lacked oxen with which to plow and could not afford to buy any, all the land had to be cultivated with a hoe. The only crops that the people had been able to grow were maize, yucca, some beans,

boniatos, and squashes. The settlers had no bread or meat, and even cassava was scarce. The report continued, saying the woods were so thick that they did not have wherewithal to clear much land for planting, and the people were reduced to misery.

The settlement of Ceiba Mocha had no doctor, no barber, no pharmacist, no priest, and people died without the benefits of the sacraments. The closest church was in the city of Matanzas, 24 leagues distant. For the reasons given, only 16 of the total 84 families actually remained on the lands allotted for the new town of San Agustin de la Nueva Florida. Others rented outlying farmlands or moved to Matanzas and Havana. Those that left sold their allotted lands to the remaining families, allowing the latter to consolidate and enlarge their holdings.

The free pardos and morenos of the original Fort Mose community were scattered by the evacuation to Cuba. Antonio Joseph de Elixio, his wife, and five children remained on the lands of San Agustine de la Nueva Florida, or Ceiba Mocha, as did Captain Manuel de Soto of the pardo militia of Havana, and his wife, Gertrudis Contrera, and child. Thomas Chisostomo, his wife Francisca Rodriguez, and their three children rented land in the countryside outside of Ceiba Mocha. Thomas appears in the burial registers of Ceiba Mocha. He died on February 23, 1798, by which time his wife Francisca had already died.

Antonio Gallardo, his wife, and two children; Domingo de Jesus Parrilla, his wife, and seven children; Joseph Ricardo and his wife; and Juan Fernandez and his wife, Flora de la Torre; all of these families moved to the city of Matanzas, where they supported themselves by working for daily wages. The pardo (actually Indian) militiaman from Havana, Joachim de Orozco, with

his wife, and four children; Pedro de Leon, his wife, and three children; and Francisco Diaz, his wife, and two children, all returned to live in the vicinity of Havana where they subsisted on *limosnas*, or government subsidies. Each of these families received one and one-half *reales* daily (eighty *reales* equals a *peso*). The pardo militiamen from Havana, Juan Fermin Quixas, his wife Maria de Soto, their child, and Marcelo de Cordova, and his wife did likewise.

The Floridian immigrants to Cuba continued over the years to petition the Crown and Havana officials for some relief, and finally, in 1770, the Crown established a pension for wives and orphaned daughters of men exiled form Florida. Several of these pension lists, dating as late as 1805, have been located, and they show that only white Floridians were recipients. Documents from the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, show that Maria Gertrudis Rozo, widow of Ignacio Rozo, a free militiaman from Mose, tried for nine years to win the same pension for herself and her orphaned daughter, but despite their proofs of legitimate marriage and government service, they were repeatedly denied on the basis of their color.

#### Nineteenth Century Ceiba Mocha Town Plan and Layout

The development and growth of colonies throughout the Spanish Empire were prescribed by the Ordinances for New Towns or Laws of the Indies. Produced by Seville administrators for the King, the Ordinances determined exactly how the new towns of the New World would be physically organized. The layout used in San Agustin de la Nueva Florida was the simplest example of Spanish American town planning.

As was common in Spain the plaza was the main urban organizing element. Around the plaza of Ceiba Mocha there were no civic buildings usually associated with the Laws of the Indies guidelines, rather simple houses that line the narrow dirt streets. The church was the only architectural element that identified this site as a public space. It served as the place of worship as well as an official point of reference and record keeping. The church was a dominant force in the lives of the early settlers. Its presence then, as it does today, provided order for the town layout of Ceiba Mocha.

The African militiamen that settled in Ceiba Mocha were skilled carpenters, ironsmiths, and masons and were familiar with the classical style of nineteenth century Europe. They built all their own structures at both the first and second settlements at Fort Mose. They built the defense line and the stockade outpost on the Sebastian River and in the repairs of fortifications at the Castillo de San Marcos. Most importantly, they had also assisted in the carpentry on the church of St. Augustine.

The Church of Nuestra Senora de la Candelaria was built in 1792, almost 30 years after the town's founding, as a result of the town's growth and a sense of permanence brought about by better economic conditions. The church is a small, but significant structure. It is approached from the north end of the plaza and accessed through a façade that is simple, but classically attractive in design. The upper part of the façade terminates in a classic pediment that reflects its pitched roof. Simple pilasters with bases and Tuscan capitols frame the facade and flank the main entrance.

As with most of the churches of this period, the church in Ceiba Mocha has an open rectangular plan. The interior space or nave is proportioned approxi-

mately three-to-one, length versus width. The height of the ceiling is slightly more than the width. The nave has no visible structural elements, other than a column that supports an interior balcony. In its present form, the balcony is too small and low for much practical use, and is not an original element of the church. Although it has been there for many decades, it is believed that there was originally an area for a choir. There are three niches in the interior wall of the nave, one of which holds a statue of the African, St. Augustine, an Early Christian Bishop. A classical neo-Gothic wooden altar was located in the sanctuary.

The bell tower is attached to the main building and to one side. It consists of three vertical sections, each separated by flat horizontal bands. The tower terminates with a cupola with four arches from which the bells are hung. There are also four pinnacles, one on each corner, and the cross that symbolically connects the building to the sky. The walls of the church were constructed of mamposteria, a technique that utilizes a mixture of materials including irregular fragments of stone, clay tile, or brick with soil and sand. The walls are very thick and require the placement of square stones at the corners, and at intermediate locations along the walls for reinforcement.

#### Housing

Most of the buildings in Ceiba Mocha were houses built in the nineteenth century that gave form to the public spaces of the town. They were built to conform to their respective sites and reflect the simple domestic life style associated with this community. There were two basic types, row houses and detached homes. The predominant building materials were stone, red clay, sand, and lime mortar utilizing the *mamposteria* 

technique. The houses built in the *mam-posteria* fashion utilized unfinished stone instead of the more polished and regularly shaped stone or *canteria* found in more important buildings in the larger towns. Clay bricks were bonded together with mortar joints from a mixture of lime and sand. The older structures have thicker joints with a narrower brick. The builders reinforced the structure with timber studs placed every two or three meters.

In several examples, houses were also built of wood. In these cases, one can easily distinguish between earlier examples of the nineteenth century and those more recently constructed. The older structures were constructed with planks of a wider width. The more recent a structure is, the narrower the planks.

Perhaps the most striking feature about the houses found in Ceiba Mocha was the use of clay barrel tile roofs. Houses have flat as well as slightly pitched roofs. In every case, however, a porch was typical. In the older buildings, signs of structural members are evident. The beams are larger and located closer together that those built in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The floor plan of the house reveals another characteristic found to be typical in this region and unlike those found in Matanzas and the larger towns. The perimeter of the houses are normally rectangular, as opposed to different configurations, such as "L," "T," "U," or "J" layouts. Ceiba Mocha houses included a patio that stretches across the entire back. Normally only one room in depth, the Ceiba Mocha houses have excellent cross ventilation. This condition is enhanced by the fact that the interior partitions dividing the house into three major spaces do not extend up to the ceiling. Instead, there is adequate space to allow hot air to rise, creating a comfortable living space below.

#### Conclusion

Although there is no physical evidence of the first architectural elements developed in Ceiba Mocha, we can observe existing configurations and spatial organizations that help explain how the domestic space was organized. The repetition of spaces, the relationship of the house with the street and the clarity of its interiors indicate the original way in which people interacted with each other and with the environment. The dwellings show that the builders had learned how to fit their structures to the climate. The house, with its personal openings, represented privacy within the collective. And, its façade announced the quality of its inhabitants, and their function in the community of Ceiba Mocha.

The flight to freedom for the African was "against all odds". They were challenged on all fronts. However, by the reliance upon skills learned or inherent skills they brought with them from Africa and cultural identities they were able to survive even within the culture of their host countries.

#### Notes

- 1. Jane Landers, *Against the Odds:* Free Blacks in the Slaves Societies of the Americas (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 1996), 6.
- 2. Taken from *Pie de Lista,* January 22, 1764, in AGI, Santo Domingo 2595.

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